

Also pending is a resolution to the question of where they will construct the new deep water pier on the Island. And soon construction of a new prison will begin; this project will cost more than US\$255,000. Finally, this year a recreational center for older adults will be built at a cost of US\$220,000.

In regard to the airport enlargement, the funds will go for improvements to the runway and the airport terminal, and the installation of a baggage conveyor belt as well as other things to make the airport more efficient.

[Editor's Note: In a bit of a look backward, and in regard to such modern esoterica as a baggage conveyor belt, we remember what the airport terminal was like in 1981. At that time, it consisted of a Quonset hut left over from years past, mostly open to the breezes. Some wood railings funneled people into a line and the airline "desk" was a large plank. But the baggage collection was what sticks most clearly in the mind. One went over to a shoulder-high fence and pointed at one's bag(s). A hefty guy picked up the bag and tossed it over the top of the fence. Well, that was OK provided it was a small bag or the recipient was a large person. If the bag's owner happened to be a small person and the bag a large heavy one, the recipient found herself/himself flattened like a pancake. Those were exciting days.]

TOURIST CONGRESS ON EASTER ISLAND

The eleventh National Congress of the Federation of Chambers of Tourism of Chile, will take place on Rapa Nui, announced Arturo Castillo Chacón, president. The dates are from 8 and 15 of August of this year. This meeting should be important for the main topic "Opening the Island to the Open Skies," a motion that previous congresses have put forth without producing any results. The fundamental point is that Rapa Nui is situated in mid-ocean at that point where many international flights cross the Pacific.

Also, they will discuss the construction of a port on the island which has generated controversy with the native population for its proximity to sacred places. The principal Chilean authorities of Economy and Tourism, plus numerous foreign tourist agents from the USA, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay have been invited to attend.

El Mercurio de Valparaíso, 20 April 1998

And speaking of tourists, during the recent visit of President Clinton to Chile, efforts were made for him to make a quick trip to Rapa Nui. However, his tight schedule precluded making the five hour flight each way. So near, yet so far. 🌺

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DEAR EDITOR:

Certain items published recently in different issues of *Rapa Nui Journal* have described "progress" on the island. We have been told that:

- Several streets and a road across the island have been paved, and more are to come
- There are 17 taxis on the island (one for every 130 inhabitants)
- About 1000 cars travel around the island (one for every

2 inhabitants)

—There are now about 300 telephones, (one for every 7 inhabitants)

—Some 20,000 tourists are expected this year (55 per day)

—There are speed signs in different areas

—Traffic accidents have been recorded, including a fatality

—Vehicles travel at high speed, with disregard to common sense and speed zones

—A high degree of politicization exists, with opposite groups fighting amongst themselves and with authorities

—The Chilean Air Force wants "a more active presence" on Rapa Nui, against the "growing interest of foreign countries" (What interests of which countries??)

All this "progress" is of great concern. Is "civilization" taking over Rapa Nui? Is this what the islanders really want to happen? Is this a good thing for the island and for its future? I am afraid the answer to the last two questions is a clear NO. The tourism industry is extremely volatile. Tourists are not interested in flying thousands of kilometers to visit a "mini L.A.," with traffic, noise, pollution, and political turmoil.

What is going to happen in a few (very few!) years to those 1000 cars? They will begin breaking down and as there are few mechanics or parts, they are going to be left scattered around the island to rot, being replaced by newer models. Why does the Chilean Air Force (or the military for that matter) want a stronger presence on the island? There is too much militarism already: Navy, Air Force, Carabineros have a high profile.

What is necessary is a special legislation to stop, and quickly, this "civilization" and "modernization" of the island, forbidding by law the importation of more vehicles, ideally the Chilean Government buying back all but the most essential vehicles.

A complete, new legal body specially developed for the benefit of the island is required to preserve this living archaeological museum that does not belong to us but to future generations. They are going to blame, and rightly so, today's authorities for not correcting the wrong directions life is taking on the island, before it is too late.

Rapa Nui is now listed as a World Heritage Site with UNESCO. Perhaps that organization might help to reverse the current trend.

I invite all interested people to express their opinions and ideas in this respect.

Yours Faithfully, Dan Gartner

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DEAR EDITOR:

In regard to Sergei Rjabchikov and the word, "*pumakari*," there can't be puma everywhere! According to Fuentes (1960:829), the word *pumakari* is the "geog. name of a fissure in the land." Thomas S. Barthel (1962), in his famous Easter Island place-name study, does not list the name. Recently, Sergei V. Rjabchikov (1997), in a Russian paper dealing with "the interpretation of Easter Island myths," has come up with an extra-Polynesian etymology: Quechua *puma* "puma" and Quechua *kari* "gold" (and associating the name with the god Makemake).

The statement that "God resides in the details" has been attributed to many people; Mr Rjabchikov now has to be added

to this group. Whereas puma naturally is "puma" (I leave it to others to decide whether this beast ever jumped the Pacific Ocean), the Quechua word for "gold" is however, sorry, *kuri*, *quri*, or *xuri* (depending on the dialect, reflecting Proto-Quechua **quri*; cf. also Aymara *quri*). In addition, as the Quechua word order is rectum-regens, the compound would give no sense—its meaning being, if one follows Rjabchikov's set-up, "puma gold."

Therefore, as we now can be sure that *pumakari* is not a Quechua word, we might look for a Polynesian etymology: The word could be split up into *pu* "aperture, opening" and *makari*, the latter being analyzed into *ma* "with" and *kari* "concavity"—thus "a concave aperture"—quite a natural descriptive name for the place.

W. Wilfried Schuhmacher, Denmark

References

- Barthel, Thomas S. 1962 Easter Island Place-Names. *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 18:100-107.
 Fuentes, J. 1960. *Diccionario y Gramática de la lengua de la Isla de Pascua*. Santiago, Andres Bello.
 Rjabchikov, S.V. 1997. K voprosu ob interpretatsii mifov ostrova Paskhi. In: G.A. Bagautdinova et al. (eds.), *Yazyovaya semantika i obraz mira*, vol. 2: 32-33. Kazan. Kazan State University.

NON-POLYNESIAN RAPANUI *ngo 'e*—'MILKY WAY'

Having Thor Heyerdahl's assumption of early sea routes from (South) America to Polynesia in mind, from a linguistic point of view some substratum influence of the language(s) of these Amerindians on the language of the later-arriving (Austronesian) Polynesians could be expected. As for Easter Island, representing a test case in this respect, the occurrence of the "words peculiar to Rapanui" (Langdon and Tryon) might be so explained. One of the "non-Polynesian" natural history terms is *ngo 'e* "Milky Way" (cf. Proto-Polynesian **kaniva* "Milky Way").

Milky Way—consisting of numerous stars which our eye perceives as a silver ribbon—has, for many ancient people, been the path upon which the dead wandered into the beyond, or the deity who protected men when it was dark. Even "Milky Way" has its origin in Greek mythology when Hera pulled away little Heracles from her breast, squirting her milk up into the sky. So it seems only natural that the Way in most languages is expressed by a compound as, for example (in translation), "celestial river" in Aymara and Japanese.

However, before using such a "hard" word as "non-Polynesian," one should always try to find an intra-Polynesian solution. Thus, looking for a Polynesian cognate of Rapanui *ngo 'e*, it does not seem to be too far fetched to think of Hawaiian *noe* "mist, fog" as a way to define Milky Way: "(star) mist" seems to be quite natural. Therefore, one could set up a Proto-East-Polynesian form **ngo 'e* (where **ng* > *n* and *' > 0 as regular Hawaiian correspondences). From a semantic point of view, even Tuamotuan *noe* "dawn, dawn light" would belong here, but **ngo 'e* would be reflected in Tuamotuan as *ngoe*.

Anyway, it seems apparent now that Rapanui *ngo 'e* has to be deleted from the list of "non-Polynesian" words. Other words on the list may have the same destiny.

Inger Spaabaek Mangor & W. W. Schuhmacher, Denmark



REVIEWS



TWO NEW BOOKS ON RONGORONGO!!



Rongorongo: The Easter Island Script. History, Traditions, Texts

by Steven Roger Fischer
 Oxford University Press, 1997. 714 pp.
 0-19-823710-3 £90 / \$115.

Glyphbreaker

by Steven Roger Fischer
 Copernicus, New York, 1997. 234 pp.
 0-387-98241-8 £15.50 / \$ 25.

Reviews by Paul G. Bahn

At first glance, a dense volume devoted to the esoteric world of Easter Island's enigmatic script is an unlikely candidate for a good read. But in "*Rongorongo*," Steven Fischer, an American-born New Zealander, has achieved a breathtaking triple tour de force. First, in tracing the development of our knowledge of this script, from its first mention by the European missionaries of the 1860s onward, his text is a feast of information. Indeed it is the most erudite piece of research on Easter Island's history and culture that I have read since the monographs of the Norwegian Expedition of the 1950s, and those were multi-authored works. Fischer appears to have seen and read every available document, consulted every source, and even the most advanced specialists in Easter Island studies will learn a great deal from his rich but succinct chapters and their copious scholarly footnotes.

Second, he presents the fullest and most accurate data compiled so far on the script itself, which currently survives as rows of incised motifs on only 25 assorted pieces of wood, scattered through the world's museums. Fischer has actually handled and examined almost all of these objects himself, prevented only from seeing the specimen in Tahiti by the cost of travel, and the two specimens in Washington's Smithsonian Institution by that museum's denying him access, for which bizarre conduct it should hang its head in shame.

Third, and perhaps most important, it was in the course of his documentation of the *rongorongo* script that Fischer, an eminent epigrapher with a knowledge of numerous different languages, achieved a decipherment (see *New Scientist* 15 June 1996). This does not mean that he can read the script yet—far from it—but he now understands the key to its structure, which constitutes a decipherment (Champollion first unlocked the structure of Egyptian hieroglyphics and was hailed as their decipherer, long before they were all read).

This is not to say that Fischer's decipherment has been greeted with universal praise. Since his claim was first published and publicized, others who had devoted many years to the same challenge have issued various objections and denials, some with scholarly politeness, others with a certain malevolence. To his great credit, Fischer discusses what he considers to be the shortcomings of his colleagues' approaches in a very detached fashion, displaying great generosity even to his most vitriolic